

Success for Operational Performance Centers of Excellence



In September 2004, I served on an integrated product team (IPT) that was directed by Air Force Maj. Gen. Darryl Scott to evaluate the “Operational Performance Centers of Excellence” concept, defined as consolidated Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) entities responsible for well-defined support or transaction-based activities. Our charter was to focus exclusively on becoming more effective in operational activities and to recommend some pilot centers. After studying the issue for a few months, we recommended eight: Plant Clearance, Small Business, Contractor Purchasing System Review, Terminations, Financial Analysis, Transportation, Naval Special Emphasis Programs and Contract Safety.

Today, less than 18 months after the first centers were stood up, we have about 30 centers across DCMA with others on the horizon. My organization, the Contract Operations and Customer Relations Directorate, has well over 400 employees in its centers.

Though not all of today’s centers are performing contract administration functions, they are all designed to successfully support the customer at the operating level by leveraging highly specialized national assets for command-wide support, responding rapidly to customer requirements and empowering employees to solve problems and improve processes.

As with all organizations, the principal measure of the centers’ success is their ability to effectively craft and execute strategies to satisfy their performance commitments to their customers. The center construct was intended to increase effectiveness in a number of different ways. One thought was that the single focus and functional supervision should drive increased skills. For example, the financial analysis function accounted for only 19 full-time employees per year but was being performed by almost 500 different employees, the overwhelming majority of whom were performing that function less than



50 hours each year. Couple that with the fact that providing professional training for such a large group for that niche function is impractical, and it’s apparent that we were not organized in an optimal manner. Another key measure of effectiveness we believed the center approach could improve was responsiveness and surge capability by not being constrained by geographic boundaries.

That’s how we envisioned the centers would help the Agency and its customers. At least equally satisfying to me, especially as a member of the IPT that recommended pursuing the concept, is what the center concept has meant for the employees in those organizations. (Note that one of our “potential issues” in our initial presentation to the senior leadership team was “employee apprehension over being moved into a center.”) There is definitely a greater opportunity for promotion. Apart from the route of becoming a multifunctional team leader in a contract management office, there’s now a much greater ability to advance within one’s functional discipline. Within many of the centers, there’s some degree of flexibility in assignment of a permanent duty station. For new entrants into a career field that need some functional training or mentoring, the supervisor almost certainly possesses technical expertise in that field. So far, the feedback I’ve received indicates that the center employees generally share a high degree of satisfaction with their positions. We aim to keep it that way.

The vast majority of the centers belonging to the Contract Operations and Customer Relations Directorate have the contract management offices as their primary customers. If you have any suggestions, please contact the center directors. They are there to help you achieve the commitments you have made to your customers.

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